

# *Report*

## National Capital Parks – Central

### ■ 1.0 Site Description

National Capital Parks – Central (NACC) is an administrative unit of the NPS that is responsible for the various individual NPS units located in downtown Washington, DC. These range from such nationally known symbols as the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to smaller individual monuments, memorials, and historic sites. The principal unifying element associated with all of these separate sites is the two-mile-long National Mall, stretching from the Potomac River adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial on the west to the grounds of the U.S. Capitol building on the east.

The area administered by NACC is surrounded by the urban development of downtown Washington, DC, the Potomac River separating the District of Columbia from the Commonwealth of Virginia, and Arlington County, Virginia. A complex urban street network lies immediately adjacent to the Mall and connects the Mall to the rest of the Washington region. In general, very limited parking areas are provided by the NPS at any of the units located within the NACC area of responsibility. Limited on-street parking is available on the surrounding street system.

All of the units of NACC are open to the public throughout the year. The hours of operation of the individual sites vary widely. Outdoor sites such as the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials are effectively open 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, with interpretation typically provided by NPS staff between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 11:45 p.m. Buildings such as the Renwick Gallery and the National Archives are typically open between 10:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Given the large number and diverse type of attractions administered by NACC, it is somewhat difficult to define a total annual visitation value. During 1998, the NPS estimated that approximately 30 million persons visited the attractions in the District of Columbia. Major attractions included the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (4,687,299), the Lincoln Memorial (4,368,912), and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial (4,258,807). The East Potomac Park area where the NACC headquarters is located were reported as having 1,264,132 recreational visitors during 1998. Clearly, many of the visitors at any one site have visited multiple sites. Given their close proximity, it could be reasonably assumed that a large percentage of visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial also visited the adjacent Lincoln Memorial, and vice versa.

However, regardless of the manner in which visitation at individual attractions is counted, the NACC area is clearly one of the most heavily visited group of attractions within the NPS.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

As would be expected for a situation where a large number of heavily visited attractions are located within the center of a major metropolitan area, there are a wide variety of existing Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) available for use by visitors. These range from the regional Metrorail and Metrobus public transportation systems, to privately operated tour bus services (both local and intercity), to privately owned and operated taxicabs, to the NPS concessionaire Tourmobile operation. The fares charged for the use of these services vary widely, from a base boarding fare of \$1.00 for the local Metrobus routes, to as much as \$20.00 for an unlimited multiple stop boarding and alighting daily pass on the Tourmobile service.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

In discussions with NPS staff, the greatest ATS needs identified were those for improved information dissemination and expanded transit service integration and coordination. While there appear to be more than enough ATS type vehicles operating in the NACC area, the operations are viewed as being essentially totally uncoordinated at this time.

The comment was made that visitors to the NACC area currently have no easy way in which to obtain information on all of the various transportation services that are available. When they attempt to access the regional core via Metrorail, they typically encounter a lack of parking spaces at suburban Metrorail stations. If they choose to drive downtown, there are very limited parking options beyond those used on a daily basis by downtown area workers. Similarly, information on private tour bus companies and the Tourmobile operation are generally not available at many suburban hotels and motels. The need for a greatly expanded, and much better coordinated visitor information system involving all effected public and private entities in the region was suggested.

A recent (1998) survey of visitors to the national monuments and memorials in downtown Washington, DC determined that the most common form of transportation used to access the area was walking (75 percent). An additional 36 percent reported using the Metrobus/Metrorail system, while 17 percent used the Tourmobile service. Thirty percent of the visitors surveyed noted the use of “other” forms of transportation such as personal car, taxi, school bus, rental car, bicycle and in-line skates. Visitors also specifically commented on the lack of parking close to the sites and the amount of walking required between sites.

A related problem cited by NPS staff was the conflict between private vehicles and tour buses for the limited number of parking spaces available in the downtown Washington area. This problem is particularly noticeable at major visitor attractions such as the Lincoln Memorial. The comment was made that tour bus companies might be willing to drop off their passengers at an attraction and move their buses to a satellite parking area, but only if this could be provided within no more than a 20-minute drive of the tour group destinations. The District of Columbia government is currently investigating potential sites for such satellite tour bus parking areas.

A near-term issue facing the NPS is the selection of a new concessionaire in 2005 when the current contract with Tourmobile Services expires. This contract has been in place for nearly 30 years, and several of the current vehicles are close to that age. Even if the current concessionaire is selected for the new contract, a major vehicle replacement program will be required. Initial estimates place the cost of the Tourmobile vehicle replacement program at \$15 to \$20 million.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

A plan prepared several years ago for the NPS (The Monumental Core Transportation Study) recommended an expanded central area ATS service that would both better connect the various major visitor attractions and provide an improved level of service. The basic routing of this service would be similar to the current Tourmobile operations, but peak period vehicle headways would be reduced to no more than once every five minutes. These recommendations are viewed by NPS staff as forming the basis for the basic service parameters of the next concessionaire contract in 2005.

NPS staff view the provision of improved transportation services information to visitors as perhaps the single most important near-term action that could help to resolve currently observed problems in the NACC area.

Longer-term alternatives include the potential for the provision of waterborne transportation services along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers to link downtown tourist attractions with those in surrounding jurisdictions.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

BRW, Inc.; *Final Draft Transportation Study – Memorial Core*, Washington, DC; December 1997.

National Park Service; Brochure: *Washington: The Nation's Capital*, 1996.

National Park Service; National Capital Parks – Central Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/nacc/>) visited October 6, 1999.

University of Idaho, Cooperative Park Studies Unit; Visitor Services Project, Report 105 – Visitor Survey, Summer 1998; National Monuments and Memorials, Washington, DC.

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Arnold Goldstein, Superintendent, NACC staff

Nelson Hoffman, NACC staff

Vicki Keys, NACC staff

Stephen Lorenzetti, NACC staff

Lisa Mendelson, NACC staff